

## **Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Subject:** Update Report on the Bee Friendly Pollinator Policy

**Date:** 22 April 2024

**Author:** Head of Environment.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to update Scrutiny members with information on the application of the Council's Bee Friendly Pollinator policy and the actions being taken to stop the decline of bee and pollinating insect populations by the creation of biodiverse pollination habitats and the banning of the use of harmful herbicides and pesticides on Council owned land.

The report follows a Council motion, on 27 January 2021, regarding the adverse effects of the use of herbicides and pesticides on land in the UK that is impacting on Bee and other pollinating species, leading to their decline.

Bees and other pollinators play an essential role in the Earth's ecosystems, and are vital to our food crops, our gardens, and our countryside, but they are declining – some species have become extinct, others are declining in range. Bees not only help maintain biodiversity but also pollinate plants which produce food. The Government has estimated that these pollinators are worth around £500 million to the UK food and fruit industries alone; bees therefore help keep healthy habitats for people and nature.

This pollinator decline is due to various external influences. These causes include disease, climate change, loss of habitat and the use of insecticides such as neonicotinoids ('neonics'). Neonicotinoid use has been linked in a range of studies to adverse ecological effects, including honeybee colony collapse disorder.

The World Health Organisation's cancer agency has recently declared that herbicides that include glyphosate may be carcinogenic to humans. Glyphosate lab trials have shown impact on bee behaviours, although not on their foraging efficiency.

Local authorities have a Duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions, introduced by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, which came into force on 1 October 2006 and in subsequent more recent acts. The Duty affects all public authorities and aims to raise the profile and visibility of biodiversity, to clarify existing commitments regarding biodiversity, and to make it a natural and integral part of policy and decision making. Conserving biodiversity includes restoring and enhancing species' populations and habitats.

### **Recommendation(s):**

#### **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

- Notes the report and makes comments as appropriate.

## 1. Background

On 27 January, the Council was asked to consider a motion under Standing Order 12 to resolve to protecting bees and pollinators and resolved to do the following:

- 1.1 Write to the Environment Secretary and Gedling Borough's local Members of Parliament, condemning the UK Government's recent authorisation in England of the use of a pesticide containing the neonicotinoid thiamethoxam, despite an EU-wide ban on its outdoor use two years ago and an explicit Government pledge to keep the restrictions.
- 1.2 Call on the UK Government to fund proper research into the hazards of glyphosates on human and nature's health.
- 1.3 Cease the use of neonicotinoids and glyphosates on all public access land that it manages in a proactive effort to reverse the destruction of the bees and pollinators and protect human health.
- 1.4 Explore other ways in which to enhance and protect bee and pollinator habitats and encourage environmental growth. This Council will therefore produce a Bee/Pollinator Action Plan. This action plan to include some of the following:
  - a) Protecting pollinator habitats via the planning process
  - b) Encouraging all new developments to provide for pollinators
  - c) Stopping the use of insecticides on local authority land
  - d) Establishing wildflower meadows on un-used areas of parks and public greenspace
  - e) Planting pollinator-friendly plants as part of amenity planting in parks, gardens and green spaces
  - f) Planting trees for bees – blossom producing spring flowering trees such as apple, cherry, hawthorn, blackthorn, willow
  - g) Working with Nottinghamshire County Council to manage road verges for spring and late summer flowers.

The motion was approved.

Working with various community 'Parks Friends of Groups' in the Borough, it was recognised that demonstrating the local authority's stance as a community influencer, through positive communications, would have a key role to play in encouraging local councils, community groups and individual residents adopting similar stances in the future.

## 2. Update on Implementation of the Policy

### 2.1 **Establishing wildflower meadows on un-used areas of parks and public greenspace**

In Summer 2021 Gedling Borough Council Parks and Street Care (PASC) Services started to introduce changes to its Parks and Green Spaces maintenance regime. It carried out an audit of its open spaces and identified un-used areas within its parks and green spaces that could be set aside as open grassland wildflower habitats and areas for tree planting to provide much needed habitat for pollinators. These include Gedling Country Park, Arnot Hill Park, Burton Road Jubilee Park, Digby Park, The Hobbucks, Breck Hill Park, Lambley Lane,

Willow Park and Arno Vale Park. The total area now set aside for wildflower meadows is 5.5 acres and is growing each year.

The Service additionally reduced its cutting regime in these areas to one per annum, to provide greater gains for pollinators.

Each year (running April to May and September to October) other areas remain free of cutting to allow pollinators forage during optimum flowering and feeding periods. Over time, this approach is creating an extensive network of habitat mosaics, which are managed to optimise the range of habitats provided for pollinators across our open spaces network.

## **2.2 Planting pollinator-friendly plants as part of amenity planting in parks, gardens and green spaces**

Further planting of both trees and wildflower meadow habitat has been undertaken at our Country Parks, Green Flag Parks and Recreation Grounds. Species-rich grassland and trees for the benefit of pollinators have been included in landscaping, for example at Gedling Country Park, Digby Park, Arno Vale and Thackeray's Recreation Grounds.

Tree planting, which includes sheltering and overwintering habitat, and increasing the number of flowering, pollen rich species, includes, blossom producing spring flowering trees such as apple, cherry, hawthorn, blackthorn and willow. Over the last 5 years we have planted 9499 native tree species.

|         |      |
|---------|------|
| 2019/20 | 660  |
| 2020/21 | 1104 |
| 2021/22 | 1691 |
| 2022/23 | 2388 |
| 2023/24 | 3656 |

Our Council's country parks are managed for the benefit of biodiversity, and pollinators are an integral part of this activity with open grassland areas managed to maintain flowering plants and grasses. The aim being to create greater diversity and optimum soil conditions. At Gedling Country Park the habitat is specifically managed for the benefit of Dingy Skipper Butterflies, providing foraging and nesting opportunities.

## **2.3 Stopping the use of insecticides on local authority land**

In January 2021 the Council stopped the use of neonicotinoids and glyphosates across all public access land that it manages in a proactive effort to reverse the destruction of the bees and pollinators and protect human health. The arising action plan enshrined this resolve and confirmed no use of the damaging Neonicotinoid or glyphosate weedkillers.

At the time members wrote to the Environment Secretary and Gedling Borough's local Members of Parliament, condemning the UK Government's recent authorisation in England of the use of a pesticide containing the neonicotinoid thiamethoxam, despite an EU-wide ban on its outdoor use and an explicit

Government pledge to keep the restrictions. They called on the UK Government to fund proper research into the hazards of glyphosates on human and nature's health.

The Council's PASC Services department has also been trialling alternatives to herbicide use. However, no viable, effective, affordable and environmentally friendly alternatives have yet been found. Work continues on this and various opportunities to further explore pesticide use reduction and trial alternatives.

Working with local schools and community groups – Bee Friendly opportunities have been developed, focussing on the range of actions that could be taken at the local level by such.

Raising awareness and mobilising local community groups – 4,000 plus trees have been planted since 2001, many have been orchards in our Country Parks and school grounds.

#### **2.4 Working with Nottinghamshire County Council to manage road verges for spring and late summer flowers**

Our partner Highways authority has also introduced a 'No Mow May' campaign in 2023 and delays its end of season cuts to maintain flowering plants and grasses for as long as practically reasonable.

#### **2.5 Protecting pollinator habitats via the planning process and encouraging all new developments to provide for pollinators**

Many of Gedling Borough's richest wildflower grasslands have been identified as sites of local importance for nature and biodiversity. These sites are protected through policies in the Council's Local Development Plan. The local development plan also contains policies to protect areas rich in biodiversity within the wider countryside from inappropriate development and identifies green networks within major settlements.

Continued biodiverse habitat surveying will assist with both the identification of and improvement of areas of existing species rich wildflower grassland under recent Biodiversity Net Gain and offsetting, planning policy changes. Such ecological surveys will help in the protection, enhancing, creation and mapping of these beneficial habitats to ensure that they thrive and grow.

All new developments in the future will additionally have to evidence Biodiversity net gain (BNG) which is a way of creating and improving natural habitats. BNG makes sure a new development has a measurably positive impact ('net gain') on biodiversity, compared to what was there before development. This is now mandatory from 12 February 2024 and part of Gedling Borough's planning policy.

### **3 Proposal**

That the committee note the report and makes comments as appropriate.

#### **4 Alternative options**

The committee could choose not to note the report and give any comments, but this would go against their wish to review the delivery of the motion.

#### **5 Financial implications**

Existing revenue and grant funding opportunities were used to fund this work. No additional council resources were utilised for the delivery of this motion.

#### **6 Legal implications**

None.

#### **7 Equalities implications**

Our Parks and Open Spaces support people in need of health and welfare opportunities. They provide area for people to take exercise and recreation and in doing so improve their mental health and overall fitness.

#### **8 Carbon reduction/environmental sustainability implications**

Other than the obvious 'carbon mitigation', in trapping CO2 emissions. There are no carbon implications as a direct result of this report.

#### **9. Appendices**

Appendix 1: List of Bee Friendly meadow habitats created on Council owned land.

Appendix 2: Promotional information used in support of the initiative.

Appendix 3: Bee Friendly Pollinator Policy and Action Plan. [Separate document].



The Community Orchard at Breck Hill

## Appendix 1

### **List of Bee Friendly meadow habitats created on Council owned land to-date.**

- 1 GCP Car Park
- 2 GCP Ivan Gollop Bee Friendly Garden
- 3 GCP Holocaust Memorial Garden
- 4 GCP 6700m<sup>2</sup> Wildflower meadow and Orchard
- 5 Arno Vale Recreation Ground
- 6 The Hobbucks LNR x 3 Meadows

- 7 Burton Road Recreation Ground
- 8 Willow Park
- 9Lambley Lane Recreation Ground
- 10 Arnot Hill Park x 2 Meadows
- 11 Digby Park Arboretum and Wildflower Meadows
- 12 Burntstump Country Park Field Margins
- 13 Breckhill Rec Community Orchard and Wildflower Meadow
- 14 Muirfield Road Recreation Ground - Community Orchard
- 15 Bestwood Country Park Field Area Margins
- 16 Carlton Hill Recreation Ground Banks
- 17 Newstead Banks

Appendix 2

**Promotional information used in support of the initiative.**

# PLEASE EXCUSE THE WEEDS WE ARE FEEDING THE BEES!

By allowing the grass and natural native vegetation to grow in this area we are increasing pollinator habitat for insects and wildlife



# PLEASE EXCUSE THE WEEDS WE ARE FEEDING THE BEES!

By allowing the grass and natural native vegetation to grow in this area we are increasing pollinator habitat for insects and wildlife



# PLEASE EXCUSE THE WEEDS WE ARE FEEDING THE BEES!

By allowing the grass and natural native vegetation to grow in this area we are increasing pollinator habitat for insects and wildlife

